

WHY ARE THEY LEAVING ?

Dr. Stephen Peters is leaving as superintendent of the Laurens 55 school district. This will be the midterm of his fourth year. We will be sorry to see such a person leaving South Carolina schools. No matter where he goes, he will be successful. That is for certain.

In his tenure as superintendent, he has increased almost all of the variables that tell you how well a school is doing. You name it and it has improved. Dr. Peters has had a career of helping other school districts as a consultant. He has begun successful programs no matter where he has been.

Carol and I have seen, in fact, the work that he has done in a visit to Laurens 55. He is a dynamic speaker and can persuade with his presence alone. Then why is he leaving South Carolina?

As with other states, the number of candidates for the superintendency has diminished greatly. When I became a superintendent in 1977, there were 144 applicants for the job. Even in the most desirable districts, if there are 20 applicants, the district is lucky.

The tenure of superintendents has diminished greatly in the years since I have retired. There are various numbers for city school supers and non-metro supers. They range from 3 years to 6 years. If you know anything about schools, 3 years is little time to make a positive impact on a school district.

We also have a new phenomenon known as the “Broadies.” These are folks that have gone through a boot camp known as “Broad Academy.” The program was begun by billionaire Eli Broad. These people were mostly military men who began thinking that they could run big city school districts like the military. They have been situated in large cities and have been universal failures. Who cares about the children anyway?

Good superintendents are those who can navigate around the many differing constituencies and still focus on the needs of the children. There are fewer of those around. The life of a superintendent is filled with land mines. This explains the lack of those preparing to become superintendents. Why risk life and limb when you are getting decent pay and the summer months to rehab and maybe make a few extra bucks.

In those states with low salaries (such as SC) that is not really the case. The pay for chief state school officers averages about 150k. That may be enough to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, but not enough for most people.

Do you have the guts to sit in front of a crowd of 500 or so community members who want you to pack your bags and leave despite the good job that you are doing? Hey, don't feel sorry for the super, feel sorry for the children who have had 3 superintendents in 5 years.